

March 24, 2016

CH-53K: First operational tester takes the King Stallion for a ride

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. – Lt. Col. Foster Carlile took his place in Marine Corps aviation history as the first operational tester to fly the CH-53K helicopter Mar. 23 at Sikorsky Aircraft Corporation's Development Flight Center in West Palm Beach.

Carlile, a Naval Test Pilot School graduate, is currently with Marine Operational Test and Evaluation Squadron (VMX) Twenty-Two in New River, N.C. and has been a CH-53E pilot for 16 years, primarily with Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron (HMH) 464. He took off at 12:15 p.m. in Engineering Development Model (EDM) 1 to experience the direct mode flight control system, as well as the primary flight control system (PFCS) maneuvers. This marked the last test flight in direct mode, which included hover points and out to 140 knots with 15 degree angle-of-bank turns. The PFCS work up included 120 knots, climbs and descents, and hovering pedal turns.

“What an experience; I’ve been looking forward to this day for a long time,” said Carlile. “I’m honored to have been able to fly the aircraft at such an early stage of the test program. All in all, the aircraft flew very well. I have no doubt the CH-53K will carry on as the work-horse of the fleet Marine force. I was very impressed with the direct mode system. It was much easier to fly than the comparable mode in the CH-53E. The aircraft vibration levels and the feel of the aircraft seemed very similar to the CH-53E.”

The flight test ran for one hour, taking EDM1 over the 30-flight hour mark since it first took to the skies on Oct. 27, 2015. The second King Stallion took flight on Jan. 22, 2016, with a third expected to join flight test early this summer.

“The CH-53K is the most powerful helicopter in the Department of Defense and we are making excellent progress with its flight test program,” said Col. Hank Vanderborght, Naval Air System Command’s program manager for the heavy lift helicopter program (PMA-261). “The program remains on track for initial operational capability in 2019.”

The CH-53K is the Marine Corps' new build, heavy lift replacement for the CH-53E, which will transport Marines, heavy equipment and supplies during ship-to-shore movement in support of amphibious assault and subsequent operations ashore. The CH-53K will be one of the key enablers of future joint war-fighting concepts by drastically expanding the fleet's logistical throughput through the joint area of responsibility. Using proven and matured technologies, the King Stallion is designed to lift a 27,000 pound external load at a mission radius of 110 nautical miles in Navy high/hot environments – three times the CH-53E lift capability. It also features single, dual, and triple external cargo hook capability that will allow for the transfer of three independent external loads to three separate landing zones in support of distributed operations in one single sortie, without having to return to a ship or other logistical hub.